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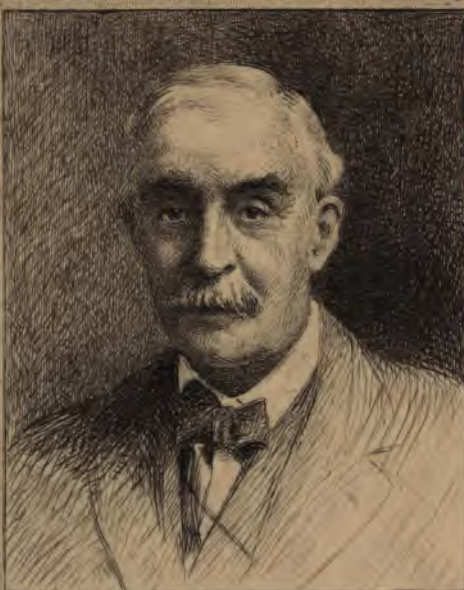
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REV. CHARLES VOYSEY, B.A.,
ST. EDMUND HALL, OXFORD; FORMERLY VICAR OF HEALAUGH;
MINISTER OF THE THEISTIC CHURCH.

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OUR FAITH AND ITS FOUNDATIONS.

*A Lecture delivered 30th August, 1876,
at Penrhyn Hall, Bangor.*

I HOPE that I see before me an assembly of thoroughly earnest religious men and women, who, whatever be their creed and opinions, have but one object in life, viz., to please God and to do His will, possessed of a fervent desire to know and believe God's Holy Truth, so far as it is on earth and by men discoverable, and who are ready to embrace and follow that Truth, cost what it may and lead where it will. All who believe in and love God must have this desire at the bottom of their hearts, and therefore I can reckon with confidence on the patient attention of all those who are in this sense really religious. For, with every acknowledgment of my own shortcomings, I yet claim to be reckoned as one of yourselves—a firm and thankful and happy be-

liever in God our Father, and, so far as poor human nature will go, a devout seeker after His truth. In an assembly so large as this, however, it is possible that there may be some persons whose chief interest in life is not religion, but mere selfishness and worldly gain, who are outwardly conforming to the religious habits and practices which society requires of them, while they are inwardly destitute of all true faith, and living as it were "without God in the world." If there be any such here to-night, I do not address myself to them on the present occasion. My errand is to the religious people, to the hearty believers, first of all ; and in the second place it is to those who, having become dissatisfied with the creed of their childhood, are yet uncertain what to believe, or how to set about in their search for a Faith that shall be compatible with reason, sustain them under the trials and temptations of life, and comfort them in the hour of death. To these I would fain speak, but I have no word now for the thoughtless, the frivolous, and the irreligious.

It is a fact too well known to be disguised or forgotten that the school of religious thought to which I belong, and which I have come here to represent, is an object of suspicion, dislike, and even detestation to a large portion of our Christian brethren. I do not wonder at this ; I can even

find grounds on which this aversion may be excused. In the first place, ignorance, and in the second place, prejudice, are the causes of the aversion. Christians in general are profoundly ignorant of what we believe and teach ; and this ignorance is due partly to the fact that we have not had time or opportunity to explain our Faith to them, and partly to the wilful misrepresentations of our views by bigoted persons and publications. We need not recount the list of bad names given to us, any one of which, such as "infidel," "blasphemer," "atheist," would be enough to keep us from a fair hearing and to engender the deepest suspicion. No wonder then that, while this ignorance of our Faith prevails, we should be regarded with distrust and aversion.

But not only ignorance, but prejudice also, has much to do with the ill names we have borne ; for it cannot be denied that what we teach, however conformable it is to the best teaching of the Old Testament and of Jesus Christ himself, is in direct antagonism to much that is popularly believed in and recognised as orthodox. To have prejudices is perfectly natural ; to feel intense aversion towards all new and foreign opinions, especially in matters of religion, is the common characteristic of human beings ; and one has to rise to a considerable height of courage and con-

fidence in the truth before one can listen attentively and patiently to an attack upon one's own deeply-cherished convictions. On these grounds, then, I say frankly, the opposition we have met with is amply excused ; and I, for one, admit that, unless we had been justified by a strong sense of our duty to God and by a burning love for our fellow-men, the disturbance of men's minds on religious questions would have been both a sin and a cruelty ; as Professor F. W. Newman, the oldest and foremost expounder of our Theistic Faith in this age, observes :—

“ What is called Bigotry has its rightful place, though when duly corrected, we cease to call it Bigotry. For lightly to propound novelties is an evil work, and lightly to unsettle men's notions in things sacred is a grave social offence, much to be reprobated.”

You will, however, call to mind, that the greatest religious movement the world ever saw was met by precisely similar opposition ; that not even Jesus and his apostles were able to escape the penalty always inflicted on innovators and religious reformers ; and that the very sincerity of their hearts and devotion to their mission were sealed by their martyrdom. The Reformation of the Church three centuries ago affords another striking illustration of the same opposition ; while that which was effected in the last and present centuries by the grand exertions of the Wesleys

and other reformers is an instance which will come home, I feel sure, to the hearts of all those whose country has been blessed by their ministrations.

Whether we are right or wrong then, the opposition we have met with was in the nature of things inevitable ; but above all things I ask you to remember, that as in the case of Christianity, of the Reformation, and of Methodism, so in our case, that opposition is no proof of our being wrong, nor any harbinger of our ultimate failure. "If this work be of man it will come to nought, but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

But my friends, as followers of Christ who appealed to man's common sense and good feeling, as Protestants who are descended from those who died to secure for us the rights of private judgment, or as Methodists who have followed Wesley, Howell Harris, Rowlands of Llangeitho, Charles of Bala, Williams of Wern, John Elias, or Christmas Evans, in their absolute independence of sacerdotal control, you have a right to demand from us a justification of our conduct. It is your very duty to dispute our invasion inch by inch, and to claim a definite answer to the question :

On what grounds do you wish to displace the old Creed and to replace it by another ?

To which I make answer in the following words :—

Be it understood, first of all, that we are just as religious and as earnest as yourselves, desiring only to believe what God himself would have us believe, and to accept only as truth that which is true in His sight. The real difference between us is that you take for God's Holy Word that which we cannot accept as such—and we have our reasons, of course, for not believing it to be *all* God's Word. We are quite as ready as you are to accept the Bible or any other Book as the Word of God when we are reasonably convinced that it must be His Word. So far then we stand on common ground, as both to be aiming at the discovery and acceptance of God's word, and both using our reason in examining the Book or the Creeds presented to us as such. Only your mind is satisfied that the Book *is*, and ours that it *is not*, what some people say it is.

Now, I admit, that if this were all or a tenth part of Theism, we had much better have gone home and attended to some honest worldly calling instead of going about troubling men's minds and hurting their feelings by saying "We do not believe what you believe." This kind of purely negative work I have never done, I have never looked upon in others but with distress or indignation. I have no right to rob another man

of his peace of mind any more than to pick his pocket, unless I can give him greater peace than he had before. I have no right to take from a lame man his crutches unless I can cure his lameness and enable him to walk alone. Neither have I any right to deprive a man of his religious belief unless I can give him in its place a higher, better and truer one.

My chief answer then to your question is ; I want you to believe more than ever in God, and not to believe less. I want you to trust Him wholly, entirely, naturally, as you would trust your dearest friend or relation upon earth ; only to trust God a hundredfold more. I want you to get rid of all your fear and to be in perfect peace ; not to remain liable to paroxysms of fear, nor to have your peace of mind perpetually open to disturbance. I want you to be assured not only of your own safety for all eternity, but of the safety of every one you love, and of all mankind. I want you to believe that God is quite as kind, and good, and merciful as the best of men. I want you to regard Salvation as being made, in God's own time, perfectly good, perfectly holy. I want you so to trust in the righteousness and love of God as not to be afraid or dismayed at any trouble of mind, body, or estate which may befall you or those dear to you ; and never to despair of your own conquest of sin, or of

the final reclamation of the most depraved sinner.

And, whereas the Christian Scheme certainly offers a promise of escape from final and endless woe to a portion of mankind, viz., to those who believe certain doctrines ; the Faith I offer you promises both an escape for all mankind from misery, and a perfect redemption from all their *sins*.

No one ever yet heard this Gospel of Theism, without wishing, hoping, praying it might be true. No one ever turned from it in sad rejection, unless it was because he was afraid it had not the divine sanction of God's Word. On every hand it is admitted to be *very good* if only true. Why then do I wish to displace the old creed and to replace it with this ? Simply because this is whole heavens better than the old one, better for poor man, more honouring to the most High God. Not only better but more true, more in harmony with the Reason, the Conscience, and the Affections of man in his best and holiest moments. Not only more true, but more consoling, more full of resignation under the present ills of this life, and more full of hope for a happy issue out of them all.

Nor do we undertake this sublime mission in heedless haste. Our thoughts have had a long time in which to ripen. Seven years of silent

meditation did I bestow on my Faith and its Foundations before I dared speak of it in public to my fellow-men ; and that was many years ago. This is no mushroom growth, nor a bulky watery production like Jonah's Gourd, which sprang up in a night and perished in a night ; but the slowly ripened fruit of many solemn and sad hours of reflection and prayer, which reached maturity after encountering many a wintry blast, and many a raging storm. I come here armed at all points by sound argument ; and, though I would not, if I could, carry you away by rhetoric, I can give a reason for every step in the rejection of abandoned belief and for every article in my simple creed. Moreover the adherents of this Theistic Faith owe little or nothing to each other but for mutual encouragement by sympathy. Each has worked out the truth in his own quarry for himself, unaided and alone, often in spite of incessant interruption or attack. And if you would be likewise blessed you must do the same. You carry about with you the field in which lies hidden this pearl of great price, and for which, if you but knew its value, you would willingly give all that you possess.

Bear with me now if I tell you as gently as I can why it is needful to displace the old creed in order to establish the new. Because, alas ! they cannot harmonise. They are in deadly mutual

opposition. Except in the single assertions common to both that God loves the world, and that hereafter the righteous will be happy, there is nothing else of theology in which orthodox Christianity and Theism are agreed. I say this openly, and perhaps at the risk of alarming some and of offending others ; but it is better to alarm and to offend than to deceive or beguile. I will not disguise the hostility between the two faiths, nor seek by any smooth words to soften off the irreconcilable difference between them. Take for example the following contrasts :—The Christian scheme teaches that all men are born under sentence of God's wrath, and that too for the sin of our first parents. Theism teaches that the sinfulness of men, which it does not deny or evade, is due to imperfection which cannot deserve the eternal anger of a just God, still less excite Him to curse the race, or sentence them to endless Hell. God is, in a certain sense, responsible for the condition and circumstances under which we are born, and though that is no absolute excuse for sin, no security against just punishment, yet it is a guarantee that God, in permitting His creatures to be born frail and liable to sin, and born thus into a world of temptation, knew what He was doing, and did it all for good, that hereby men might and should grow to be perfectly good and holy. For without sin and temptation none of us

could be virtuous or know what virtue means. You yourselves will understand the necessity for treating all these points of detail with great brevity, lest I should keep you here all night. And the subject of the origin and purpose of evil is a very deep one, and cannot be argued out thoroughly in an hour.* I only call your attention to the contrast between the Christian explanation of it and the Theistic one. The Christian scheme represents God as defeated by the Devil, and as losing in endless hell a vast portion of mankind in consequence of that defeat. The Theist says God's will was never once defeated—never will be. He made man, as he is, with a full fore-knowledge of all that he would be and do on earth, and with the infinitely good purpose of making all things work together for the good of all souls that He had called into being. Evil is, therefore, only a means to an end, and no one can abide in it for ever; for this is God's appointed road to immortal goodness. Neither suffering nor sin are absolutely incurable, or even needless. A perfect God has appointed both with a perfect purpose, as a perfect means to a perfect end.

Having pronounced the whole world under a curse of God's endless wrath, the Christian scheme

* See my volume on *Mystery of Pain, Sin, and Death*. (Williams and Norgate.)

offers salvation to those who will accept it on certain terms. Nearly all Christians are agreed that if the terms are not complied with, the sinner must be eternally lost. Theism, however, denying altogether the existence of the curse, maintains that all men *must be saved* ; that there is no endless hell in which any one can perish ; that every soul which ever breathed is infinitely more dear to God than any babe to its tender mother ; and that if He cares for sparrows, how much more will He care for the children of men !

The Christian scheme gives prominence to the division of mankind in the future world into two states, viz. : everlasting happiness, and everlasting misery. Theism promises but one state for all, viz. : everlasting progress—an endless march onwards towards the boundless perfection of God. Thus sin shall be vanquished, and yet no one out of the weak and woeful myriads of men can be lost. All shall be happy because all must become good.

The Christian scheme needs a Saviour and an atonement—sadly to the disparagement of the Divine justice and mercy, and perplexing to the mind of man, since it involves one and the same person being God and man at one and the same time : and involves too the incredible marvel of a dying God praying to his Father and saying that he was forsaken by Him who was also him-

self, and being raised from the dead though he could not die. Theism has no Saviour, no atonement in this sense, because none are wanted. There is no curse to remove, no endless hell to be delivered from, and therefore, all the superstructure falls to the ground, the moment you touch the foundation—which the Theist says is no real foundation at all, but the figment of men's brains and exaggerations of their own horror of sin, at the expense of the great justice and holiness of God. The only salvation we need is to be *cleansed* from sin and made strong to do what is right, to be delivered from selfishness and unlawful desires and to be made all that God wishes us to be ; and for this grand work of salvation God is our only Saviour and our all-sufficient helper, as St. Paul saith, "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." The Christian scheme, while it offers hope to ourselves if we only believe in the atonement, has no hope to offer to us when our husbands, or wives, or children die unbelieving or unconverted. I know of no more unspeakable woe on all God's earth, than the woe of hearts laden with this heavy grief. Like Paul, who was willing to be "accursed from Christ," if only he might save his people from destruction, so do parents and loving friends feel ready to give up

their own share in the mansions above, rather than that their nearest and dearest should sink in the eternal flame. Oh ! it passes understanding how anyone believing in orthodox Christianity can be merry and glad, can eat, drink, or sleep, or keep his brain from reeling madness, while one of his fellow-men, to say nothing of his own child or kindred or dear companions, is in peril of everlasting torments ! They cannot believe it, or they would go mad with horror and despair.

But "it is revealed" you say, it is there, in the book, put even into the mouth of Christ, and enshrined in Catechisms and Creeds. "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." If these words be true and I go home and die this night, that must be my portion—the worm that never dieth, and the fire that can never be quenched. Look me in the face, my brother man ! and tell me, does not your whole mind and heart and soul give the lie to those texts, and reject as a blasphemy against God such an invention of fools ? To a man you will agree with me in saying that a sentence so flagrantly unjust, so intensely and unspeakably cruel, would never have been

tolerated for a moment, or received anywhere human assent but for one thing, viz.: because it is believed to have been written under the inspiration of God, and absolutely a revelation of God's own mind and will. Believing this, you stand excused for maintaining the dogma ; I too would maintain it as stoutly as any of you, if I believed God had really spoken it.

And this brings me to answer another question which you will put to me, or certainly ought to put to me, as earnest religious men :—*Why do you disbelieve the Bible ? Why do you reject the idea that it is an infallible revelation from God ?*

Before I answer this, I must first caution you not to misunderstand me. I think the Bible contains much priceless truth, and I have no objection to say that whatever is true is God's truth, or God's word, wherever it be found, in the Bible or elsewhere. For the truth it contains I reverence the Bible. I honestly love those portions of it which feed and comfort my soul. Would to God all men loved and valued those portions as they deserve ! But I reject the Bible as a Divine and infallible revelation from God, because it contains—besides its precious truths—many glaring errors, contradictions, falsehoods ; misrepresents the most High and Holy God to that degree which, if the writers had been conscious of it, we could only call blasphemy. Simply taking

the highest, noblest utterances about God in the Bible itself, and then contrasting certain other portions of the Bible with these noble texts, it is manifest that both portions cannot be true. One at least must be false. To give one example : In the Psalms we read, that "the Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works," "the anger of the Lord endureth but for the twinkling of an eye," while "His mercy endureth for ever." In contrast with these we read of God requiring the human sacrifice of seven of Saul's sons in order to remove a famine in the days of David ; and after they were hung up "God was entreated for the land." Again we read, that when God wanted a pretext to punish Israel, He moved David to number the people, an act really ascribed in Chronicles to Satan himself.

In contrast with God's forgiving love and endless inexhaustible mercy, we read that a certain sin will never be forgiven, neither in this life nor in the life to come. And "that the smoke of the torment (of the damned) goeth up for ever and ever before the throne of God and of the Lamb." This is but one instance, and I cannot go further into the subject unless I give you another lecture to-morrow night on the Bible alone, by which you would be completely convinced that we have not only good grounds for not accepting all that the Bible contains, but also for disbelieving that

it is an infallible revelation from God. Finding the good and the evil, the true and the false, mixed up together and lying side by side in the pages of the Bible, we are forced to regard it, like all other pretended revelations from God in other lands and other ages, as the product of the human mind, as a record, faithful it may be, of human thoughts about God and the universe and human destiny. Even if the Bible were, as I believe it to be in many respects, the best of all the so-called revelations from God, yet that cannot prove it to be divine, any more than the best dictionary or the best work on mathematics would be divine. If it be the best Bible yet written, that entitles it to our best attention and most careful study ; not, certainly not, to our superstitious and false reverence for it as the Word of God. And mark you, I do not deny that God speaks to men ; my life would not be so happy as it is if I did not believe in God's power and willingness to whisper to us in our moments of appeal and perplexity, or in His faithful goodness to give to all who feel their need the light and knowledge sufficient to guide them in the intricate path of life. But whenever He so speaks, it is to each one alone ; whatever He so says is a revelation only to the soul who hears it. It cannot be given away at second-hand. No one has a right to say to his neighbour, " This or that was spoken to

me by the mouth of the Lord." For why? We have no test by which we can discern absolutely and infallibly whether the words thus repeated are God's words, or are the invention of the speaker. And having no such test we should be ever liable to be deceived ourselves, or to deceive others. [See Jeremiah xxiii.] Was not Micaiah thus wofully deceived when he recounted to Ahab as God's revelation only a blasphemous dream of his own invention? [2 Chron. xviii. 9—22.]*

It is common, I know, to appeal to miracles. If a man can work miracles, it is considered a proof that all he says must be God's word. But every other Bible in the world was attested, or is said to have been attested, by miracles. Are they all revelations from God? Moreover, the Bible itself contains records of wicked and uninspired people working miracles, such as the Witch of Endor raising Samuel to speak unto Saul; and actually warns us in Deuteronomy xiii. not to accept such testimony. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods and serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love

* See page 61.

the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death ; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God.”

Nor is it any use to try to prove that the whole Bible is true and God’s Word because some parts are true and consoling. For the false parts contradict the true, and could not possibly proceed from one and the same unchangeable most Holy Spirit.

I have proved over and over again that the Bible contains what is foolish, erroneous and false, impious and immoral, besides all the wise, good, true, devout and righteous teaching for which we prize it. I have here just said enough to answer your question, Why do you reject the Bible as an infallible revelation from God ? Once more, let me urge that I do so only out of love and zeal for God ; because I abhor impiety and blasphemy, and delight in speaking good of His name ; I do so because God himself has given me Reason, Conscience, and a tender heart, all of which are shocked and outraged by some of the Bible teachings ; and most of all because God has taught me to love and trust in Himself without one doubt or fear, and therefore He has given me courage to examine the writings which my fellow-men declare to be God’s Word, but which God Himself nowhere and never declared to be anything of

the sort ; and having had the courage to examine it, as it is, the work of men of like passions as we are, He has given me grace to detect and reject the falsehoods it contains and to prize and cherish more than ever all its precious truths. If you, my friends, heartily and unreservedly believe in God and trust Him, you will have the courage to do the same. But if you believe not, or only trust Him with half-a-heart, or believe in your fellow-men more, you dare not venture on the enquiry or face its inevitable conclusions. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

And now, perhaps, some of you will ask me "*What is your Faith ?*" Though, surely I shall have spoken in vain, if our Faith has not been pretty clearly revealed to you already.

Here I will speak only for myself, for in this matter of religion, which is a matter only between each individual soul and God, we have no right to make creeds for each other. Still, when I give you my own belief, I know I am giving you the belief also of many thousands of thoughtful intelligent earnest men and women all over the world.

I believe in one God, who is perfectly wise, perfectly capable and perfectly good, whom—for want of a better name—I call our Heavenly Father, the Father and Friend of myself and of all mankind.

I believe that God's mode of existence or nature is utterly beyond our understanding, and therefore it is folly and impiety to attempt to describe or to define Him ; yet reason bids us consider Him as One who thinks, and knows, and loves—not a person in the sense of having a form, or manlike properties, but a person in the sense of being conscious, intelligent, moral and loving.

I, therefore, believe God's will and purpose to be at the root and source of all things ; that nothing has ever existed, that nothing has ever happened, without God's foreknowledge, or without some entirely good purpose which cannot be defeated.

I believe that God's order is a perpetual not an occasional or special providence, and therefore, whatever may happen to myself or to others never happens by chance, but by His loving will, and shall surely end in all good and in the highest good to every one of us.

I believe so entirely in the love of God towards us, who are His *children* as well as creatures, that He will not lose one of us by death, but that the last great change on earth is the entrance to a higher life—the details of which I cannot conceive or comprehend—but which I expect with certainty, because God's love is constant and everlasting.

I believe also that God's will is that we shall

outgrow, get rid of, and finally subdue all evil; and, therefore, that we must strive and fight against it here and now, and undergo all the pain and shame which wilful sin deserves, and which are designed to correct our faults and improve our characters. Whatever such suffering God sees to be necessary for the cleansing of my soul, here or hereafter, I am, therefore, not only quite ready to bear, but if I could I would not shirk it or get it laid upon any one else instead. Moreover, all the misfortune or sorrow which may fall to my lot, which is *not* due to my sins or in any sense deserved, I also welcome from the hands of my loving Father, believing that He knows best what is good for me, and will not allow any real evil to befall me, or any grief to cloud my heart, but for my highest good.

Thus I am equipped for life—armed at all points against its dangers and ills; and prepared for death, and for the many terrors worse than death which encompass us around. I am not only living with a perpetual sense of safety for myself, but likewise rejoicing in the eternal safety of all those whom I love, and of all mankind too, whose sorrows and sins touch my heart, though I know them not as friends. The world is bright indeed under such a sky, and, with the Sun of Righteousness eternally shining down upon it, I should be ashamed of myself

if I were not happy ; I should scorn myself if I had any fear. Verily the peace of God is a peace which passeth all understanding, and which the whole world can neither give nor take away.

And now we come to the last question **which** I believe you will care to put to me, and perhaps the most important question of all which I have been endeavouring to answer to-night :—*What is the foundation of your Faith ?*

Yes, my friends, this for you is the main point. I have cast away the Bible as a foundation ; I no longer give any credit to Churches new or old ; I take the *ipse dixit* of no priest, of no man however highly exalted ; I would not even take the word of one risen from the dead on this most solemn subject of religious belief. I know the Bible contains and teaches my Faith. But I do not believe it because it is to be found in the Bible. It got into the Bible just as it got into my own heart first, and then into this Lecture. And right glad I am to see it there and meet it there in a book so beloved in all this land. But the Book is not my teacher, nor my authority, nor the foundation of my Faith. No, it teaches too much of quite another sort of religion for me to trust to it. When I read some portion of the Gospels, I say to myself, surely Jesus of Nazareth was a Theist too, and thought with me ; but in a moment more I turn over the pages where

they make him say what is quite contrary to my precious Faith, and so I cannot, if I would, take him for my authority and foundation. Moreover, I have watched and searched so carefully that I find it to be proved beyond all question, that the heart and mind of man are quite enough to account for the Bible, without having recourse to any theory of inspiration ; and that the errors and misleadings it contains are proofs of its human origin, and therefore, the truths and the exquisite lessons it contains are also of human origin. I thus discover that those who felt and believed as I feel and believe came by their faith in the same way as I came by mine—the only way, indeed, in which it can come to any living soul. The foundation of my faith is not what God is said to have *said*, or is said to have *written* ; but *what God has actually done*. God's work, visible, palpable, incontestable, that is the foundation of all my Faith, the pledge and promise of all my hope. God's noblest work that we know of is *man*. We *know* of nothing higher than the best possible man ; and though there may be, and very likely are, spheres above spheres of nobler beings, unspeakably higher than men, yet men are enough to teach us what we must believe of their Creator and God. How much more then is the heart and life of one good man a sufficient revelation of what God is ! Good,

I mean, even with all his human frailties. I do not speak of any ideal person who never had any faults, but of ordinary good, kind-hearted persons, such as we meet every day. Now, these people are weak and imperfect, and not even so good as they might be or believe that they might be; yet in spite of this they are kind-hearted enough to be trustworthy, to wish all possible good to their fellow-creatures, and to do it too so far as in them lies.

I ask you, my friends, in turn a question, to which I require a simple answer, "Yes" or "No." Is God inferior to the good-hearted man? Of course not, you say, for the Creator must be at least equal to, if not better than, the best of His creatures. We cannot, of course, tell how much better He is; but we can tell with absolute certainty that He is good up to a certain point, up to the level of the best man that ever breathed. Here we are on the rock of ages at last, on a foundation which only God himself has laid, and against which superstition and unbelief may dash themselves in futile fury. We will just ask our good-hearted man a few questions:—

If you were in any sense responsible for the creation of one of your fellow-men, would you have made him, knowing that he would be tormented for ever in a burning Hell?

Having created him, would you not feel bound in honour to protect and to bless him, so as to secure for him at last perfect goodness and happiness ?

If in the nature of things some suffering and evil were to befall him which you could not prevent, would you not try your utmost to remedy them and cure them ? If you saw that some suffering and evil were the best or even the only means for securing his good, would you not at once inflict or cause them to be inflicted upon him ?

If your creature broke your laws and set you at defiance, would you not think it wicked to torture him at all out of revenge, still worse to torture him for ever ? Would it not be more righteous to punish him only to correct his fault, and to make him a better man ? Would it not be horribly unjust to inflict any torture upon him as vengeance for sins which he could not entirely help, since he was not born perfect and not kept from temptation ?

Would it not be vile in you to require the blood of an innocent being, as an atonement or propitiation, before you would forgive the offender ?

Is it not more just to forgive generously and freely, than to demand an exorbitant penalty ?

Finally, ought you not to *wish* above all things to make your creature good and happy ? If you had the power to do this, could anything on earth stop you from doing it ? Would you not overcome all obstacles, and, however long the work of redeeming him might take, would you not be sure to do it at last—if you only could ?

Very well, I am satisfied. I know what I feel in my own breast ; you good-hearted man have told me what you would do ; and if we were to go through the wide world together for generations and centuries asking these questions, we should always get the same answers, so long as men were as good-hearted as we are here to-day. And I deliberately say to you, my friends, God cannot be lower than ourselves ; cannot be *less* good, *less* just, *less* merciful, *less* loving than we are or feel bound to be towards each other. Nay that aggregate of pure, and holy, and tender qualities which we concentrate under the sacred name of Father, being the best and highest of which man is capable, we by instinct impute to our God, whose Fatherhood is higher than ours even as the heavens are higher than the earth, and whose tender love and compassion were never equalled by the most devoted and passionate yearning of a mother for her babe.

This is a foundation you cannot shake. Man is here—an awful irresistible confutation of your

doctrine of Devils and of endless Hell. Man meets you at every turn, and gives the lie direct to every priestly or Biblical invention that would present God as acting towards sinners in a way in which men themselves would be afraid and ashamed to act to each other. Every face you meet, in the market, in the streets, in the fields, and by the seashore, is God's messenger to you that His own heart is love and only love ; and if any more, it is justice, and goodness, and mercy, which are all love under different forms. Every fellow man or woman is a Gospel of hope, a pledge of God's divine compassion, a promise of His everlasting blessing. You want no better Bible than your own heart in its highest moments, or the face and hand of your pitying friend.

Let us stand by the bedside of a dying woman :

Here ! wake up, good woman, before you die ; cease your piercing shrieks of pain, and your feebler groans which tell of life fast ebbing away ; listen for one moment, and speak but one word. What shall we do with your brutal murderer—this husband that has wrecked your life, robbed you of all you enjoyed, and at length in his frenzy of wickedness has smitten and kicked you to death ! His hands have torn you in pieces, his feet have made ghastly wounds in your face which he once kissed and fondled, and

your shattered body, which he was wont to caress, lies bleeding from his cruel tramp. Quick! speak! shall we torture him for this for the rest of his mortal life? No? not for a year? a month? a week? a day? "No, No, No!" cry the dying lips, "John, I forgive thee all; kiss me, man, once more."

John cannot forgive himself. The day will dawn when he will come to himself, and feel all the bitterness of his great and irreparable wrong. Torture intense, but healing, may be his portion for God knows how long. But can any one believe that that poor murdered wife, herself perhaps weak and aggravating, and far from perfect, is nevertheless whole heavens above God in all goodness and mercy and forgiving love? Is it credible that God will torture that man for ever in hell, though forgiven by his poor wife? Is that true? If so, let me never see another sun, let me flee even to the bottomless pit, so that I never come face to face with him who is more horrible than the very blackest of guilty men.

Banish these impious thoughts, and lift your hearts in thankfulness, my friends, that it has been brought home to you, that endless hell is a blasphemy against a Holy God; that God cannot do what men would feel to be evil, unjust, and cruel to each other; that He is whole heavens

more just, more merciful, more loving than the best and noblest of His creatures, and, therefore, that we can most heartily and unreservedly put our trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and without one doubt or fear commit the well-being of ourselves and of all mankind into His hands as unto a faithful Creator.

LECTURE ON THE BIBLE.

*Delivered first at the Memorial Hall, Manchester
on the 13th June, 1871.*

PART I.

THIS evening I shall endeavour to fulfil the promise made in my Lecture on Rationalism, that I would verify, by illustrations drawn from the Bible itself, all that I have said against the doctrine of its infallibility.

I do not ask for your indulgence so much as for your pity, in having to perform a task which must deprive me more than ever of the esteem of many good men.

At the outset, I must confess that it is an odious and a thankless task to have to expose the faults of a venerable book, which has been the fruitful source of blessing and happiness to countless millions of our race, and which is to me, this very day, both dear and precious. The

very faults which I have to hold up for your censure are by no means exceptionally bad when considered in the light of those times in which they occurred. Some of them are common human blemishes, which any of our best men in the nineteenth century might have fallen into had they lived and written in those early times. Nay, I am not sure that in every period throughout those 2,000 or 3,000 years, supposed to be covered by the Biblical writings, the Bible writers were not always in advance of their own times, and that their views of God and of duty were not, at each successive point, superior to those views which prevailed in other nations around them. Thus, what now appear to us as faults, were, by comparison, originally great merits, whereby alone the books of the Bible obtained their supremacy over the literature of the world. To illustrate this, let me remind you of the story of Abraham offering up Isaac. We will criticise it from another point of view by-and-by. At this moment, I ask you to look at it in the light of those times in which Abraham lived. The narrative, at least, assures us that the patriarch resisted the temptation to offer up his son as a burnt-offering ; and in overcoming it, Abraham most surely made a protest against the horrible human sacrifices which prevailed around him, and which he so narrowly escaped imitating. Bad as things seem to be, and really

are, in some of the Bible records, it is more than probable that they were not nearly so bad as much that went on among the Gentile races which were coëval with the personages in the Bible histories. Moreover, the Bible contains so much that is true and beautiful, so much that will never perish so long as men aspire to virtue and communion with God, that the whole world would be a loser if its pages were to be closed for ever, and its precious words forgotten. In proper hands, and read in a reasonable common-sense manner, by persons whose minds are absolutely free from superstitious reverence for it, the Bible may still be, and I hope will ever be, a source of delight and instruction—a text-book of praise and worship, and a treasury of examples of all that good men admire.

My opponents, then, will not accuse me of approaching this subject without due reverence for what is really reverend, or without a becoming tenderness for those pious feelings which have thrown a halo around this venerable book—feelings in which I myself share, and which I should be sorry to lose.

This present work is forced upon us by those who have placed the Bible before us in a false light, who have made claims of Divine origin and authority for the book which the book does not make for itself, and who have foolishly and suicidally affirmed, that if the Bible be not in-

fallibly true from beginning to end, it is of no value at all.

Our opponents are not all agreed in their views of the Bible, but I shall endeavour to answer them all at once. Their leading positions are the following :—

Some Bibliolaters affirm that the Bible is all true from beginning to end, that “every letter, every word,” and so on, has been written under the direct inspiration of God, and is, therefore, of one uniform Divine authority throughout. This class I shall endeavour to answer by showing that there are absolute and irreconcilable contradictions between one part of the Bible and another part; and that in the Bible there are downright falsehoods. One such instance, of course, would be sufficient to overthrow the position taken up by this class.

Another class of Bibliolaters affirm, that though there may be errors in science, history, chronology, and geography in the Bible, yet on one point it is absolutely and invariably true, viz., in its religious and moral teaching. This class will be answered by showing that the religious and moral teaching in the Bible is not uniform nor coherent, but in some places contradictory of itself, and that some of the religious teaching is degrading to God, and some of the so-called moral teaching is degrading to man.

Another class, driven from both of these posi-

tions, have finally taken refuge in that part of the Bible which relates the history of Jesus Christ, and they affirm that although the Bible is full of errors, scientific, historical, etc., and even religious and moral, yet the teachings and life of Jesus were absolutely perfect, without the slightest blemish or defect. This class will be answered by my illustrating, from the Gospels, certain moral blemishes in the character and life of Jesus, and even in parts of his teaching, as reported in the Gospels themselves.

But I beg you to observe, and especially desire any opponents who may be present to observe, that the whole and sole aim of this Lecture is to refute the ideas *that the Bible is infallible, and that Jesus was no less than the Almighty God*. I stand here to-night with this single purpose; I do not come here to make men love the truths of the Bible less than they did before, or to regard with diminished homage what was noble in the life and beautiful in the teaching of Jesus himself. I attack only the extravagant notions that the Bible is all true, that its moral and religious teachings are infallible, and that Jesus was more than man and free from every human blemish.

My arguments will be addressed to your reason, your consciences, and your hearts. "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say."

First of all, I would warn all the spectators in

this contest against the tactics of orthodoxy. They will be told that all these objections to the Bible are old, and have been answered over and over again. To this my reply is, that I have searched in vain for any satisfactory answers to them, and have never found them; my reputation and my future prospects as a teacher of religion are at stake in this evening's work. I offer these as a pledge that I am going to speak honestly of the Bible, and not wilfully to misrepresent any part of it; and also that I am not going to make myself a laughing-stock by bringing forward objections which have really been already satisfactorily answered. Another of the orthodox manœuvres is not to allow us to take the words of the Bible as they stand, but they insist on altering an ugly passage by the change or withdrawal of a word or two, so as to get rid of a difficulty which cannot otherwise be overcome. The school represented by the (late) Rev. F. D. Maurice is eminently skilful in this manipulation of texts. In my opinion, if this be permissible, then any text may be made to give any meaning, and the greatest possible comfort may be drawn from an Athanasian Creed. The attempt to alter and modify passages in the Bible should at once be recognised as an admission that those passages are not God's word, which of course it would be impious to tamper with or to attempt to improve.

I may be called very narrow and arbitrary, but I insist upon keeping close to the plain sense of the words in our authorised Bible, which the ministers of religion of all denominations put, without any warning, into the hands of every one who can be got to read it. Revision of translation is no doubt necessary, and if conducted fairly, would in many instances be unfavourable to orthodoxy. But until we have a new authorised version, we must use the old one.

I will give you the book, the chapter, and the verse for every quotation which I shall make. I cannot render myself "infallible" for the occasion or else I surely would ; but I may safely say, that if a wiser head or a keener eye than my own should discover a blunder or two in my remarks, those few possible blunders will not detract more than a grain from the weight of the crushing evidence which will still remain. If all my quotations *but one* could be explained and harmonised satisfactorily, and that one irreconcilable contradiction or moral blemish remained, it would be enough to accomplish my task of refuting the infallibility of the Bible.

My work divides itself into the following sections, though here and there they may unavoidably overlap one another :

(1.) I shall adduce a few illustrations of contradiction pure and simple.

(2.) I shall cite passages of Scripture which attribute to God feelings or conduct unworthy of Deity.

(3.) Passages which directly or indirectly inculcate wrong-doing or bad motives in man.

(4.) Passages from the Gospels illustrating the human error and infirmity of Jesus, inconsistent with the idea of his being God.

(1.) CONTRADICTIONS, PURE AND SIMPLE.

The first instance which I will notice is the contradiction between the two versions of the Ten Commandments as given in Deuteronomy v. and Exodus xx.

The Fourth Commandment, as given in Deuter. v. 12, 13, 14, 15, runs thus—

“Keep the Sabbath-day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord

thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day." (Please to notice the reason here given for the observance of the Sabbath-day.)

Now at the end of the Ten Commandments here given in Deuteronomy v. (see verse 22) we read, "*These words* the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: *and he added no more.* And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me."

Compare this with Exodus xx. In the 1st verse we read "God spake all these words, saying." Then follow the Ten Commandments as we read them in Church, and the Fourth Commandment (ver. 8—11) runs thus: "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."

Here we find two glaring contradictions—first, a different reason for the ordinance of the Sabbath is given in Exodus to that given in Deuteronomy,

and secondly, if "*God added no more*" than those words given in Deuteronomy, He could not have added the reason assigned for the Sabbath as given in Exodus.

Another instance of contradiction is where one and the same act is ascribed in one place to God, in another place to the Devil. In 2 Samuel xxiv. 1, we read, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." "And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done," ver. 10.

In 1 Chronicles xxi. 1—7, the same event is thus described, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel."

In Genesis xxii. 1, it is written, "God did tempt Abraham." In James i. 13, it is written, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."

This is a case in which shuffling is resorted to. Opponents will say the word "tempt" does not mean to tempt, but to "try one's faith"; to which I reply for the present by asking on what authority do you give a totally different sense to the same word in a book written by one and the same Divine Being? If this is God's word, what right have you to say that He does not exactly

mean what He has written ? We shall come to the temptation of Abraham presently.

1 Samuel xv. 10, 11. "Then came the Word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king." Verse 29 says, "And also the Strength of Israel (God ?) will not lie nor repent : for He is not a man that He should repent."

Exodus xx. 5 (2nd Commandment). "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children." Compare this with Jer. xxxi. 29, 30, "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity ; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." And this from Ezekiel xviii. 20, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son," and Deuteronomy xxiv. 16, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for their fathers : every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

This was quoted and acted upon. 2 Kings xiv. 6, "The children of the murderers he slew not ; according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses."

It is the boast of Bible-worshippers that we should have no ground for belief in immortality

were it not for the Bible. I beg to remind them of the following passages, which distinctly teach that there is no life after death :—

Psalm vi. 5. “For in death there is no remembrance of thee : in the grave who shall give thee thanks ?” This occurs in a prayer offered up in sickness that the speaker’s life may be spared.

Isaiah xxxviii. 18. “The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee : they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.”

Job xiv. 10, 12 and 14. “Man dieth and wasteth away ; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ? So man lieth down and riseth not : till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. If a man die, shall he live again ?”

Eccles. ix. 5, 6. “The dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward. Also their love, and their hatred and their envy is now perished ; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun.”

Verse 10. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

Eccles. iii. 19. “That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts ; even one thing befalleth them : as the one dieth, so dieth the other ; yea,

they have all one breath ; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast."

The inspired Solomon certainly had no faith in immortality. And his words are contradicted both in the Old and New Testaments repeatedly.

The contradictions in the New Testament, where they are not merely verbal, can only be proved by quoting very long passages. But they include the following:—

Luke accounts for the whole time of Jesus' infancy in this way. After his birth in Bethlehem (Luke ii. 22) his parents took him to Jerusalem to perform some religious ceremony in the temple, when he was forty days old, and then at once departed (Luke ii. 39) into Galilee to their own city, Nazareth, and from there they went every year up to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover (41). The youth of Jesus was thus accounted for till he was 12 years old. Now Matthew ii. says that immediately after the birth of Jesus his parents carried him down into Egypt.

Moreover, in the first three Gospels it is affirmed that Jesus did not openly and publicly claim to be the Messiah, and that when Peter acknowledged him to be the Messiah (Matt. xvi. 16—20), Jesus "charged his disciples that

they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." Whereas the fourth Gospel (John i. 41, John iv. 25, 26) describes Jesus as openly claiming the title of Christ, or Messiah, from the very beginning of his ministry, not only among the Jews, but also among the Samaritans. It is impossible to get over a contradiction like this.

Take again the intentional omission by Matthew from the genealogy of David's descendants, of no less than four persons, only to make his assertion appear to be true that there were three periods of fourteen generations each.

Moreover, both the genealogies in Matthew and Luke say they trace to Joseph—not to Mary—and yet both the books say that Joseph was not the real father of Jesus; how then could Jesus be descended from David through a man who was not his progenitor at all? The names purposely omitted by Matthew are Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah in one place, and Pedaiah in another place.—See 1 Chron. iii. 11, 12, and 18.

In the first three Gospels Jesus is represented as going to the wilderness *immediately* after his baptism, and being there forty days. In the fourth Gospel he is said to be on the third day at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and not a word is said about the wilderness or the temptation. If he was not in two places at once, one of the two varying accounts must be false.

Again the first three Gospels fix the day of the last supper on the night of the Passover ; the fourth Gospel makes it the night before that. To prevent mistake, in John xiii. 29 we find that after the supper Jesus says something to Judas understood to be an order to buy what was necessary for the morrow's celebration. According to this Jesus was crucified on a Thursday, and not on a Friday.

The inscription on the cross, though copied down by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is different in the different inspired books.

Matthew xxvii. 37. "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Mark xv. 26. "The King of the Jews."

Luke xxviii. 38. "This is the King of the Jews."

John xix. 19. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

1 Cor. xv. 5. Paul says Christ was seen of the *twelve* apostles, after his resurrection, whereas there were only eleven, if Judas had hanged himself ; and the twelfth apostle, Matthias, was not elected till after the ascension.

Human beings might easily fall into such discrepancies in their reports ; but God certainly could not have done so.

Then there are all the endless contradictions between Kings and Chronicles, and between the first three and the fourth Gospels ; between the

several narratives of the Resurrection ; between the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. It is impossible to enumerate them. In place of this, I beg to refer you to the following admirable books, which deal with these subjects at length.

The Hebrew Monarchy, by Professor FRANCIS W. NEWMAN.

The Creed of Christendom, by W. R. GREG and a new and very complete work, entitled

The Bible, is it the Word of God? By T. LUMISDEN STRANGE.

The Finding of the Book, by JOHN ROBERTSON, of Coupar Angus.

John or the Apocalypse, by Rev. PHILIP DESPREZ, Vicar of Alvediston.

The English Life of Jesus, published by THOMAS SCOTT, Esq., of Ramsgate.

The Fourth Gospel, by the Rev. J. J. TAYLOR.

The Four Gospels as Historical Records, published by WILLIAMS & NORGATE (1895).

PART II.

I COME now to the consideration of those passages which attribute to God feelings or conduct unworthy of Deity. It must be observed that very many of these passages will apply equally to the third branch of our subject, viz., to instances in

Which wrong-doing, or bad motives, are directly
Or indirectly inculcated upon men.

As the chief aim of this enquiry is to correct
Popular impressions as to the *moral* character of
God, I pass over those passages in which God is
described as walking upon earth, talking face to
face with men, and even eating and drinking
with them—all of which are totally at variance
with our modern conceptions of the Divine
Being.

In Gen. vi. 5—7, we read, “God saw that the
wickedness of man was great in the earth, and
that every imagination of the thoughts of his
heart was only evil continually. And it repented
the Lord that he had made man on the earth;
and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord
said, I will destroy man whom I have created
from the face of the earth; both man, and
beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of
the air; for it repenteth me that I have made
them.”

Here is a degrading picture of the Almighty
and All-wise God. He is represented as having
made a grievous mistake, and being sorry for it:
“It grieved him at his heart.” He has created
a race of men incurably wicked, and there is
nothing for it but to destroy them. Not content,
however, with destroying the wicked men and
women, he must needs destroy the innocent

beasts, and creeping things, and the fowls of the air, as though he could not destroy man without destroying all creation as well.

In Gen. viii. 21, after Noah's sacrifice of one of every sort of clean animals, "the Lord smelled a sweet savour ; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." Why ? One would expect it was because they were now going to be good—not at all. God goes on to say, "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth ; neither will I again smite any more everything living as I have done." The same reason is given for God's sparing men, as was given before for his destroying them ; as much as to imply that God had acted on an impulse of savage and indiscriminate rage, which had also proved to be futile, and when he had had time for reflection, or after being appeased by a burnt-offering, he resolved never to do so again.

In Gen. xii. 11—20, we have an account of a deliberate lie told by Abraham, in order—not to protect the honour of his wife—but to save himself from being murdered on her account. I will not read the whole passage, but ver. 17 tells us that God punished—not Abraham for his falsehood—but poor Pharaoh for his being deceived. "The Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife."

Pharaoh had taken her on Abram's own statement that Sarai was his sister, and being purely innocent he was yet punished as guilty, while the cowardly and guilty Abram goes free.

In chap. xx., a similar scene is recorded between Abraham and Abimelech, King of Gerar, Sarah being dangerously beautiful at more than ninety years of age (Gen. xvii. 17). In ver. 9, Abimelech asks Abraham, in reference to his falsehood, "What have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." And yet in ver. 7, God is represented as saying to Abimelech, "Abraham is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live. And in ver. 17, "So Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants."

Any child in a Sunday-school would learn from this passage that God was monstrously unjust, because Abimelech had not even laid his hand upon Sarah, whereas all the wrong done, or intended, was the direct result of Abraham's lie. For the benefit of those who do not know their Bible, it is striking to observe that a similar affair is related also of Isaac and Rebekah, and Abimelech, King of Gerar, in chap. xxvi. of the same book.

We come now to the story of Abraham's

sacrifice of his son Isaac (Gen. xxii.). To state it briefly, it was either wrong or right for Abraham to kill and burn his son on an altar as a sacrifice to God. If it was right, why did God stop him from doing it? It was wrong, and God knew it. Then, since it was wrong to do this, was unworthy of God to tempt Abraham to do it; to command him to do it; to keep that wicked purpose harboured in his heart all those three days of silent agony. It was horrible in a Divine Being to suggest so odious a thought as that of child-murder, and that to satisfy his own craving for human sacrifice. The whole story may be easily and satisfactorily explained by reference to the customs of the time, except that part of it which describes God as tempting Abraham, and commanding him to do a wicked deed.

If you ask a child who has been trained in a Sunday-school, "Who are God's favourites among the Bible heroes?" he will be sure to mention Abraham and Isaac, ready to sacrifice the virtue of their wives for their own safety; Jacob the fraudulent and accomplished liar; Lot, a drunkard and worse; David addicted to bloodshed and lust; and Solomon a notorious and wholesale profligate. This comes of your indiscriminate Bible teaching.

Exodus iii. 8, the Lord said, "I am come down

to deliver them (*i.e.*, the Israelites), out of the hand of the Egyptians (ver. 17), and to bring them into the *land of the Canaanites*," etc. Ver. 18 says that God ordered Moses to say unto the King of Egypt, "Let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God."

What is this but to teach that the God of all truth did not hesitate to order His prophets to deceive the king in order to secure his purposes?

Verses 21 and 22 of this chapter give God's orders to the Israelitish women to borrow jewels of gold and silver and raiment of the Egyptian women, "And ye shall spoil the Egyptians." This order is repeated in the 11th chapter, verses 2 and 3, where the men are included in the order. Thus God is represented as making them rogues as well as liars. Many times in the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 14th chapters of Exodus, God is described as telling Moses that he would *harden Pharaoh's heart* and the heart of his servants, so that he should not let the people go. And then it is stated on each occasion but one, "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." The Bible-worshippers shall not get out of these obnoxious passages by saying that it was a judicial hardening caused by the sinner himself, for this interpretation is not only flatly

contradictory of the words in Exodus, but the Apostle Paul himself cuts off that retreat by adducing this very case of God's hardening Pharaoh's heart as an illustration of the doctrines of election and predestination. Rom. ix. 17, 18, "Even for this purpose have I raised thee up that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth;" "therefore," adds St. Paul, "therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

We might well ask the Apostle what sort of a "name" hath this vile representation of God declared throughout all the earth? A name of infamous untrustworthiness and malignity; the name of one who, instead of helping to turn a humbled sinner from the error of his ways at the moment of his softening, deliberately stepped in to crush the rising flame of good intention, and to harden his relenting spirit into fresh evil—and all "to show his power."

That is not the name of "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

These early books abound in such misrepresentations of God, but I must press on and miss a great deal, or else we shall never have done.

In the 32nd chapter of Exodus, verses 9—14,

God is represented as being on the point of consuming all the people in His fury, but was kept from doing so by an appeal to His vanity.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen **th**is people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. **N**ow therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume **th**em. And Moses besought the Lord and said, **L**ord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath and repent of this evil against thy people. And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”

In Numbers xiv., verses 11—20, a similar scene occurs, in which (ver. 15, 16) Moses says to God, “Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore hath he slain them in the wilderness. Pardon them, I beseech thee And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word.” But now just

consider what this pardon amounted to. God goes on to say, ver. 21, "But as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." And how was this "glory" to be shown? Verses 22, 23 tell us, "All those men which have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness," etc., etc., surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers; neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land, and his seed shall possess it." So, after all, the children of Israel who came out of Egypt, deluded by promises of the land of Canaan, all perished in the wilderness except two, Caleb and Joshua. God was either unable or unwilling to keep his oath which he swore unto them.

On another occasion—the revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—Moses and Aaron again prevent the destruction of the people, but this time by an appeal to God's sense of justice. Numbers xvi. 20—23, "The Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and wilt

thou be wroth with all the congregation ? ” In spite of this plea 14,700 persons died of a plague, besides the 250 insurrectionists who were swallowed up by an earthquake. The plague would have gone on till the last man was dead, if it had not been for Aaron rushing in with a censer full of incense, which made an atonement for the people, and the plague was stayed (ver. 47, 48). Can any picture of God be more degrading than these ?

In Numbers xxi., ver. 4—6, God is represented as having sent fiery serpents among the people only because they complained that they had neither bread nor water, and they did not enjoy the manna. Then in utter forgetfulness of the second commandment, already written by God’s finger on tables of stone, God, instead of removing the biting serpents, orders Moses to make a fiery serpent of brass, and set it on a pole, that anyone who was bitten might look on it and recover.

In Numbers xxii., verses 20, 21, 22, “And God came to Balaam by night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them. And Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass and went with the princes of Moab. And God’s anger was kindled because he went.” Verses 34, 35, after Balaam’s conversation with his ass, he sees the angel of the

Lord and says, "Now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again," and yet the angel of the Lord says unto Balaam in reply to this, "Go with the men." A thousand asses speaking with a thousand human voices is not so incredible as this monstrous fickleness and injustice here attributed to God.

At your leisure read the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy which abounds in degrading pictures of the Divine character.

In 2 Samuel xxi. 1, we read, "There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites." After seven of Saul's sons had been hung up before the Lord in Gibeah, we read in verse 14, "After that, God was entreated for the land."

2 Sam. xxiv. 1 : "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." Ver. 15 : "So the Lord sent a pestilence," which carried off 70,000 men. Ver. 17 : David is distressed. He says to God, "Lo, I have sinned and done wickedly ; but these sheep what have they done ? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."

Here is the creature fairly accusing the Creator

of an atrocious act of injustice. As usual, after some burnt-offerings had been made, "the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed," ver. 25.

1 Sam. vi. 19. The Lord smote 50,070 persons in the little village of Beth-shemesh for peeping into the ark. Those that were left are recorded as saying—possibly in bitter irony—"Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"

2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. Uzzah ventured to put forth his hand to keep the ark from falling over, but was killed on the spot in reward for his reverent service.

1 Kings xxii. 19—23. Micaiah, the only true prophet out of 401, who persuaded Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead, says the following: "I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven (heaven only, mark you) standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. And he (*i.e.*, God) said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do

so. Now therefore," adds Micaiah, "behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these thy prophets."

Ezekiel, probably referring to this, says, chap. xiv. 9, "If a prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and"—can you believe that I am not reading falsely?—"I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him."

The Apostle Paul, too, says (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12), "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth." *

My friends, is it not incredible that such teaching as this should be believed to be the very Word of God—the inspired revelation of His mind and will? Surely Atheism is better than this. With what pretence of justice were Ananias and Sapphira slain for lying unto God, when God is represented as lying unto men? I defy the Bibliolaters to get over such difficulties as these extracts present. No explanation will avail them but that only which carries the inevitable conclusion that God is represented in parts of the

* Father Hyacinthe, in a letter from Rome, dated 22nd June, writes: "God never requires falsehood, but falsehood often has need of God; and it is never so effective as when it presents itself to us in His name."—*Times*, 29th June, 1871.

Bible as an immoral being, and not "righteous in all his ways," or "holy in all his works;" that he does not "love truth and equity," and that "lying lips are" not "an abomination unto him," and that He is neither just, nor true, nor trustworthy. I will only say, further, on this point, that I have had to miss many and many an illustration because it is impossible to give them all.

PART III.

I now come to the third part of our subject, and will cite passages from the Bible which directly or indirectly inculcate what is wrong.

The first group of such passages will consist of those which describe vile and wicked conduct either without a word of censure or with positive approval.

There is a passage in Gen. xix. 30—38, which I have too much delicacy to read, and in which a gross case of incest is recorded without a word of censure. The offspring of this crime, Moab and Ammon, are especially protected by God, as you will find on reference to Deut. ii. 9 and 19.

In the story of Rebekah's and Jacob's lying (Gen. xxvii.), which is so familiar to all Bible

readers, you will not find one word of censure upon them for their wickedness. Jacob himself is always included in the sacred three when God calls Himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This no one would object to, were it not that the meaning is that these three men were special favourites of Jehovah. And to show that this is not my own arbitrary interpretation, I refer you to the Prophet Malachi i. 2, 3, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother, saith the Lord; yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau;" and to Paul the Apostle, who quotes these words approvingly, "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix. 13).

Jacob was an utterly mean, cowardly, and fraudulent deceiver, and made so by his own mother. Gen. xxv. 29—34, says, "And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him, and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils."

Gen. xxx. 28—43 gives us an account of how this chosen servant of God cheated his uncle

Laban, and secured for himself by dishonest means all the best of the flocks and herds. In xxxi. 42, Jacob says to Laban, his uncle, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." Wherein he claims that God had not only sanctioned but helped him in his fraudulent dealings.

Esau, on the contrary, who is never praised in the whole Bible, was a fine, noble, generous character, his only recorded fault being the desire to take revenge on Jacob when he had discovered his villainy; but his truly magnanimous forgiveness of Jacob afterwards made ample amends for that natural fit of anger.

Jacob's faults pass uncondemned, while Esau is said to be hated by God.

I pass now to the history of David to notice one instance of outrageous villainy which never receives a word of censure in the Bible.

1 Sam. xxvii. records how David and six hundred men were sheltered and hospitably entertained by Achish, King of Gath (verses 2—6), "He and his men, every man with his household, even David, with his two wives, and planted them in a town called Ziklag." Now day by day David and his men made marauding expeditions against the aborigines of the land by whom he was sheltered. Verse 9 tells us that David smote

the land, *i.e.*, the Philistine district, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away all the spoil, and came to Achish. (Ver. 10—12), “And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to-day? And David (falsely) answered, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Kenites And David saved neither man nor woman alive to bring tidings to Gath, lest they should tell on us. And Achish believed David.”

This instance of treachery reminds me of one that must not be left out of this black list.—I mean the treachery of Jael (Judges iv.) Like other stories which are so well known, I will not waste time in reciting it all. I only call attention, first, to the extreme sacredness in which Orientalists regard the pledge given and received in acts of hospitality. If food was given and received, it was tantamount to a solemn oath that no harm should be done by one to the other. There is a story told of a robber who entered a house, intending to murder the owner for the sake of his wealth, but that, in creeping along, his hand touched the walls; he put his hand to his mouth and tasted salt, whereupon he instantly withdrew from the house, gave up his coveted spoils, and confessed afterwards to the owner how his life had been preserved.

I mention this to show how sacred was the

implied pledge in hospitality given and received. But what aggravated the conduct of Jael was, that (ver. 17) there was peace between Sisera's king and her husband, Heber, the Kenite. As her husband's friend, Jael thus receives Sisera (ver. 18), and says, "Turn in, my lord, turn in; fear not." After being refreshed with a draught of milk from Jael's hand the weary warrior lies down in perfect security and sleeps. The awful tragedy you know, and one could only extenuate or make excuses for the crime on the possibility of a panic of terror coming over Jael's mind for the safety of her husband, who was thus compromised by sheltering the enemy of the victorious Israelites. But no human heart now-a-days could look upon her act as anything but a crime, and a crime of the deepest dye.

Turn to Judges v., and what do we read? (ver. 24), "Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be: blessed shall she be above women in the tent." (ver. 31), "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord." These are the words of Deborah, a prophetess—an inspired woman—and this is a part of that Book which even to-day is asserted to be the infallible Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost!

The books of the Kings and Chronicles abound in instances of vile conduct uncensured, or actu-

ally commended. I will give you but one—King Jehu. 2 Kings x. 30 informs us that “The Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart; thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.” In the ninth chapter, verses 6 and 7, we find the command of God to Jehu to “smite the house of Ahab.”

Now let us briefly enumerate the acts of Jehu, which were done in obedience to God’s command, and which were rewarded by God’s approval.

He first shot King Joram, and then ordered the assassination of King Ahaziah (chap. ix. 24, 27); then, by a subtle and explicit message to the Samaritan elders, he obtains the heads of seventy of Ahab’s children (chap. x. 5—10), which were packed in baskets and sent to him to Jezreel. The next morning he addresses the people in most hypocritical language—“I conspired against my master and slew him; but who slew all these?” thus pretending to have had nothing to do with that massacre. This he followed up by slaying all the rest of Ahab’s relations and friends, and great men and priests, until he left him none remaining (chap. x. 11). But, with the usual elasticity of Scrip-

ture, after they were all slain, there were a great many left, viz., forty-two brethren of Ahaziah (Ahab's son-in-law) and a whole temple full of priests. The former he slays without a word of warning ; the latter he ensnares into his hands by hard lying (chap. x. 18—28). It is plain enough to us to see that Jehu only acted like an unscrupulous usurper, who finds the safety of his throne dependent on the extermination of the late dynasty, while his slaughter of the worshippers of Baal was partly done as a sop to the priests of Jehovah, who had been instrumental in urging his pretensions, and partly to crush all lingering sympathy with the house of Ahab in the minds of the people. He was a consummate dissembler, hypocrite, and murderer ; and yet the Bible tells us that he did according to all that was in God's heart, all that was right in God's eyes, and received for so doing God's approval and reward !

Of direct commands which are immoral and degrading there is, alas ! a too plentiful supply in the Bible. It is impossible to give more than a few illustrations.

1st. As to the usages of war. God is said to have commanded the slaughter of women and children, even infants and sucklings. Joshua x. 40 sums up an account which must be terribly familiar to the ears of all church-goers:—"So

Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, *as the Lord God of Israel commanded.*"

In Numbers xxxi. 17 and 18, Moses gives a command to slay every male and every married woman; but the virgins were to be reserved for their own enjoyment. Lest it should be said that this was only Moses speaking, refer to the twenty-fifth and following verses—"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, . . . Divide the prey," . . . so and so—32,000 persons, women, *who were virgins.** Ver. 40 says, "And the persons were 16,000, of which the Lord's tribute was thirty and two persons." We do not wonder at savage men doing these things; we only ask, in the name of the Holy God, how your Bible worshippers dare to tell us that these were God's commands?

Now turn to Numbers v. 11—31, beginning, "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying,"—It is the ordeal for jealousy—No, I cannot read it; it is too disgusting; and if I read it here, or in church, I should earn the character of that notorious Protestant lecturer who was blamed for going about the country exposing

* I have altered the Bible expression out of decency (v. 35).

the alleged obscenities of the Catholic confessional.

The law of *divorce* (Deuter. xxiv. 1—4) is another instance of immoral commandment; and we have the authority of Jesus for saying so. He upsets the Divine authority for the law by ascribing it to Moses:

Again, the law of *retaliation* (Deuter. xix. 21), "Thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye; tooth for tooth; hand for hand, foot for foot," is eminently immoral, also reversed by Jesus.

Hosea is commanded (chap. i. 2) to break the Seventh Commandment. (See also chap. iii. 1.)

Levit. xxvii. 29 involves human sacrifices, "None devoted shall be redeemed; they shall surely be put to death." "Every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord." Jephthah, no doubt, acted upon some law like this:

Exod. xxii. 18 enacts a law which has caused thousands and tens of thousands of defenceless women to be murdered—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." What are we to think of a God who knew so little about the men and women he had made as to believe in witchcraft himself? Slavery is also inculcated in Leviticus xxv. 44—46, Thy bondmen and thy bondmaids shalt thou buy of the heathen that are round about you, and of the strangers that do sojourn among

you, and ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you ; they shall be your bondmen for ever.*

Although the Hebrews might not marry any foreign women, yet they might have as many concubines as they pleased of the captives taken in war, or by purchase. Hence Solomon figures with his 700 wives and 300 concubines—1,000 women in all (1 Kings xi. 3).

Lastly, the Bible itself endorses all that I have said, in these words, from Ezekiel xx. 25, "Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."

I must not omit from this catalogue those blemishes on the beautiful Psalms in which Oriental hatred and revenge find such fierce expression. Psalms cix., cxxxvii. are enough to quote in establishment of my argument, while I can assure you that there are many Psalms in the whole book which are more or less disfigured by prayers for revenge and curses against foes.

It has been urged by some that the moral teaching of the New Testament is also at fault. No doubt it is imperfect, but it does not deserve to be placed in the same black catalogue as that from which I have drawn the foregoing illustrations. One book of the New Testament, how-

* I have condensed this passage for the sake of brevity.

ever, has earned our just execration. My sense of justice rose up in rebellion against it when I was but a boy, and I detest the book more than ever now. It is the last in the Bible—the Book of Revelation. In chap. xxii. 18, 19, the writer fiercely but vainly tries to guard his production from being corrupted by transcribers, and this he does by a malediction worthy of the spirit which has ever animated the diabolical side of the Christian Church. “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book ; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.” I only wish the writer of that book could hear me say to him, “Your mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, and your feet are swift to shed blood.”

False pretences generally defeat their own end. Let Bibliolaters beware of making threats against those who question the Divine origin and infallibility of this book. Those threats will make more rebels than they ever made slaves.

PART IV.

I now come to the last branch of my enquiry—that which relates to Jesus Christ. I will show,

from the New Testament itself, that, however splendid and noble he was as a man, he could not have been the Almighty God, creator and preserver of the universe. Nothing that I can say will detract from his great human excellence. But, for all that, he was a man like ourselves; and even in a narrative purposely designed to represent him as faultless, he discloses certain sure signs of human error and infirmity which can never be reconciled with the idea that he was the Almighty God on earth.

His knowledge was defective. In Luke ii. 52 we read that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." The wisdom of God must be absolute and complete, and therefore not capable of increasing at all. If Jesus increased in wisdom, then he must at one time have been deficient in wisdom, and could not have been God himself. But it is further stated that he increased in favour with God. What can be more absurd than to say that God increased in his own favour. This text is perfectly consistent with the idea that Jesus was only a man, but utterly inconsistent with the idea that he was a God.

Then he believed that blindness and dumbness were the result of being possessed by a devil

(Matt. xii. 22—28)—“Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb, and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw . . . When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. And Jesus answered, If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? . . . But if I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come to you.”

Another proof of his belief that devils were the immediate cause of disease is found in Matt. xvii. 14—21. A poor lunatic lad, subject to epilepsy, falling oftentimes into the fire and into the water, could not be healed by the disciples of Jesus, who thereupon reproaches them for their want of faith, and says, “Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him.” He adds, in the 21st verse, “Howbeit this kind [of devil] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

His knowledge of Jewish history was at fault when he accused his countrymen of having murdered Zacharias, the son of Barachias (Matt. xxiii. 35). It was Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, who was slain as described between the temple and the altar. You will find this recorded in 2 Chron. xxiv. 20—22. Zechariah, the son of

Berechiah, was one of the prophetic writers of the Old Testament, and lived 320 years later. A very trifling mistake truly, but one which makes all the difference to the claims made for Jesus that he was a God.

With respect to his future return to earth, he himself admits (Matt. xxiv. 36) that "of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only." Mark xiii. 32 says that Jesus said still more explicitly, "No man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." That he spoke the truth when he confessed this ignorance is too well established by those passages in which he predicted his return "before that generation should pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 29—35). "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other Verily, I say unto you, this generation

shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." If words have any meaning at all, these words show that Jesus was mistaken in his prediction. I know a common method of trying to get out of this awkward fact is to say that the "generation" spoken of did not mean generation, but the present epoch or age of the world between Christ's ascension and his return to earth. But this involves the error of the apostles and the early Church, who all firmly believed that Christ would come again in the lifetime of some of them, and who accepted his words literally. (See 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.) I think myself that the immediate followers of Jesus were more likely to have known what he meant than we are. The later epistles show signs of the disappointment of this expectation (see 2 Peter iii. 4 and 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3).^{*} And it is worthy of notice that the Fourth Gospel which many critics believe to have been written A.D. 160—180, carefully excludes all these predictions of Christ's second coming, and has a most suspicious looking passage in chap. xxi. 20—23: "Then Peter, turning about, seeth (John), . . . and saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him,

^{*} The genuineness of these two epistles is doubted by some critics.

If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? . . . Then went this saying abroad among the brethren that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die, but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

When this book was written there can be little doubt that every one of the apostles and contemporaries of Jesus was dead and buried, and John, who perhaps survived them all, had been dead half a century.

That saying of Jesus concerning Judas Iscariot always seemed to me inconsistent with the idea that Jesus was his creator. "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born!" (Mark xiv. 21.) The Creator is surely responsible for the existence of all his creatures, and such a speech is unbecoming on the lips of the Creator.

Had Jesus been the Almighty God, neither could he have uttered those words on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As a cry of anguish and disappointment it was natural enough on the lips of frail man; but if Jesus were God himself, those words could have no meaning, or be but a solemn mockery.

In the Fourth Gospel we have presented to us a

character in Jesus Christ in striking and painful contrast to the Jesus of the first three gospels. In the Synoptics, he is at least simple and plain, willing to teach and to reply to enquirers, and free from narrowness in his religious views. But in the Fourth Gospel we find him represented as often striving to perplex and confound his questioners. He is in a state of chronic antagonism with the men around him who are not his own followers, and begins his ministry by condemnation of all who do not believe on him. Chap. iii. 18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

He teaches the doctrine of Election notwithstanding. Chap. vi. 44, he says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Chap. ix. 39, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and they which see might be made blind."

Is this God loving the world impartially, or is it not? In chap. xvii. 9, speaking of those who believe on him, he says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world." In chap. xi. 41, 42, he is represented at the grave of Lazarus as saying, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me," and as saying this only for effect, "but because

of the people which stand by I said it." God would surely have known his motives in saying, "I thank thee that thou hast heard me," without Jesus telling Him so ; and to announce the motive to the bystanders was to give an air of insincerity and artifice to his own conduct. I cannot believe this of Jesus. This alone stamps the narrative as incredible and fictitious.

According to this untrustworthy Gospel he taught not the doctrine of the Trinity, but rank Tritheism. Chap. xvi. 7, "It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Chap. xiv. 26, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my name." According to this, one God is said to be unwilling or unable to be where another God is, but will take his place when he departs. These passages do not teach any doctrine of a Trinity, but only Three Gods in the most unconquerable plainness. Moreover they directly contradict the statement that "Jesus [himself was] full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke iv. 1), and that John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth (Luke i.), and his father Zecharias, and the aged Simeon were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and that the Holy Ghost (Matt. iii.) visibly descended upon Jesus at his baptism.

I see traces of human weakness in the language which Jesus is reported to have used against the chief priests and scribes and pharisees of his time. I know what it is to be tempted to abuse and denounce fiercely the men whom in our day we believe to be hindering the work of God, and keeping back from the people the light of truth. But what holds me from giving free utterance to my angry thoughts? Why, instead of abusing the men themselves, do I force myself into attacking only their erroneous or mischievous opinions? It is my conscience. My moral sense tells me that I must not call ill-names, nor let my righteous indignation against falsehood and blasphemy get the better of me, and lead me into malediction.

My reason also tells me that men are scarcely ever responsible for their beliefs or misbeliefs; that they deserve pity if they are in error, and do not deserve curses. Hence I could not, without a guilty conscience, take up the language of Jesus against the bigots of our own day. I could not say to any men, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John viii. 44), nor this, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. xxiii. 33). I cannot be sure that he ever used such improper language as this to his fellow-men, but I am very sure that the Gospels say that he did, and

therefore the Gospels represent him as giving way to bad temper, and doing that which all decent people now-a-days agree in condemning as not only wrong but futile, for abuse is not argument.

The last point in the recorded character of Jesus which I shall criticise is that which I shall deliberately call his disregard of family ties.

Luke ii. 43 tells us that "the child Jesus [being twelve years old] tarried behind in Jerusalem ; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." After three days they found him in the temple, and his mother said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me ? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them" (Ver. 48, 49). (Notwithstanding all that is written about the miraculous birth.) "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them" (Ver. 51). (Notwithstanding his Father's business, which he at once gave up.)

Now what chills my heart in this story is not that a little boy of twelve years old should be so thoughtlessly cruel as to get away unknown to his parents ; but when he was told of their sorrow in losing him, he made no sort of apology

—never uttered a word of tender regret, but only began to vindicate himself on the ground of a higher obligation ; as though God in heaven ever did or ever would desire a child to inflict such a wound as that on its parents' hearts.

I know what it is to lose a child for a few hours. I have helped more than one poor mother to find her lost little one in the dense streets of London, and I have felt and witnessed the agony of parental anguish, worse while it lasts than the wrench of death. And yet this youth of twelve, said also to be God Almighty, could inflict such a wound as this and not know it ; and when tenderly reminded of it, neither felt nor expressed the least sorrow. This disregard of natural ties is again exhibited, Matt. xii. 46—50, "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him." Then a bystander tells him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." But instead of regarding the Fifth Commandment, which says, Honour thy father and thy mother, he answered and said unto him that told him, "Who is my mother ? and who are my brethren ? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren !"

I can hardly read such passages with patience.

They exhibit Jesus as completely destitute of natural affection, cruel and disrespectful towards his mother, and carried away by egotistical vanity. Mark iii. 31—35, tells the same tale, and Luke viii. 20, 21, likewise, with this variation, "My mother and my brethren are those which hear the word of God, and do it." What about the Fifth Commandment being the Word of God ?

The fourth Gospel has furnished two instances in which Jesus is described as guilty of a coldness towards his mother, which is unpardonable and unworthy of a man. Chapter ii. gives an account of the marriage at Cana in Galilee ; verse 3, "When they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus said unto him, They have no wine." Instead of saying tenderly, Leave it to me, dear mother, he says, "Woman, what have I to do with thee ? mine hour is not yet come."

Those who are ignorant of Greek must not suppose there was anything disrespectful in the term "Woman ;" it was equivalent to Lady or Madam. But the cutting coldness of this reply betrays the absence of natural affection, which, as a son and a father, I here openly denounce as a frightful blemish in the life and character of Jesus Christ.

Worse than all, when that neglected mother, who had followed him about with so much ma-

